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SUBJECT: "COSTA RICA, INC.": ANTI-CAFTA-DR FILM MIXES
HITLER, JUDAS, THE ATOM BOMB AND FREE TRADE

¶1. Summary: A slick new film appearing periodically on Costa Rican public television uses a mixture of emotionally laden images, misquotes, and insinuations (probably falling just short of libel) to attack the U.S.-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). While objective viewers are likely to find the film to be over the top and ridiculous, the film serves the purpose of rallying those who are already true believers in the anti-CAFTA-DR cause. End summary.

¶2. University of Costa Rica (UCR) professor Pablo Ortega produced a 100-minute documentary film entitled "Costa Rica, Inc." ("Costa Rica, S.A." in Spanish) that since before the February 5 election has appeared from time to time on UCR's public television channel 15. Professor Ortega's film is a call to arms against CAFTA-DR and uses the crassest forms of propaganda to achieve its aims. The chief villains in the film are the United States and the Costa Rican negotiators of CAFTA-DR.

¶3. The film contains a lot of footage on Iraq and claims that USTR Zoellick made support of U.S. foreign policy a condition for a country to join CAFTA-DR and that a firm in Costa Rica is making parts for a U.S. missile guidance system. Interspersed throughout the film are images of burned and mutilated children, Abu Ghraib, Hitler, the atom bomb, and Judas kissing Jesus. Although provocative images are not explained, the linkages are obvious -- when the United States is mentioned, we see Abu Ghraib; Judas is pictured when Costa Rican CAFTA-DR negotiators' "betrayal" is being discussed.

¶4. Sober looking university professors and economists are interviewed in the film making outrageous claims: e.g., that negotiations were conducted in secrecy, that the agreement would make Costa Rica "part of the international production of arms," and that Costa Rica's sovereignty and territorial integrity will be jeopardized.

¶5. Perhaps the worst part of the film are the attacks on the Costa Rican negotiators of CAFTA-DR, implying that they were motivated by personal gain to sell out their country. The presentation is terribly confusing and probably calculated to confuse. The most damning piece of "evidence" is that Costa Rica's chief negotiator, Anabel Gonzalez, is married to a member of a law firm that has clients who will benefit from the agreement. The film also notes that the Oscar Arias family's sugar business will also profit from CAFTA-DR.

¶6. The film's budget included a USD 5,000 grant from the Audiovisual Development Fund of Central America and Cuba (Cinergia). The DVD can be purchased for two dollars or downloaded free at costaricasa.tendenciadigital.com. It is distributed to a variety of NGOs and other groups.

¶7. CAFTA-DR negotiators Anabel Gonzalez and Alberto Trejos objected to the airing of the film on the grounds that the personal attacks against them amounted to defamation. They also threatened to sue. (Note: The film seemed to have been carefully crafted so that a suit against the makers would fail.) Those who liked the film, like Marta Zamora, head of the Citizens' Action Party (PAC) in the Legislative Assembly, said that the negotiators' threat of legal action constituted an effort to "quash freedom of expression, university autonomy, and the Constitution in general."

¶8. Comment: "Costa Rica, Inc." is well enough made that it holds one's attention and at times entertains. It uses humor, contrasting Anabel Gonzalez, the worst of the film's villains, with a fictional Wonder Woman of Alajuelita (a working-class suburb of the capital) who in tights and cape defends the poor against the depredations of globalization and free trade. None of this will convince the majority of Costa Ricans who are sensible people, but the film can be an effective tool with children, adolescents, ideologues, simpletons, and the shock troops in the anti-CAFTA-DR cause.
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